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TO THOSE WHO ATTENDED MY 70th BIRTHDAY PARTY OR EXPRESSED THEIR GOOD WISHES

My dear friends:

The only thing I've been suffering from in the four weeks since I last saw or heard from you is inflation. This has been caused by my all-take-no-give situation of revelling in the piles of letters, telegrams, gifts, etc., that you (whether you were able to be present or not) heaped on me at the dinner, and that have kept coming in ever since, while I in return, to my shame, have written you not a line until now. My excuse has been that I have been trying to follow the doctor's orders to relax, even though at the same time meeting my appointments with the students, the flies, the MSS, the MRS, and other unavoidable. However, the pressure of my pent-up feelings, insufficiently relieved by the above-mentioned inflation, has at last reached the stage of escaping through the safety valve of a letter of expiation and explication to all of you. I hope that you, in reading it, will make plenty of allowances for its shortcomings, in consideration of the very exceptional environmental circumstances under which it developed, taken in connection with the fact that in recent generations there has been a significant relaxation of selection that has allowed the increasing prevalence of some unseemly qualities.

That party you gave me was--to use an expression once coined by Edgar Altenburg for a very different occasion--"a wonderful thing from A to Y". Since it was I myself who supplied the Z this time, by withdrawing my attention at a critical moment, perhaps I should forever after hold my peace. However, I want to reassure you about that Z. It was not the sign of lack of appreciation or indifference that it may have seemed to be. In fact, if medical rites had not been so quickly invoked I would have responded to you shortly, and given you evidence of my regard for all that you had done. I would only have requested that you supply me with a couch, ensconced on which, Roman style, I could gladly have proceeded with the festivities. As the exhaustive and exhausting tests conducted on me practically without intermission over the next 40 hours showed, nothing was basically wrong with me and even my heart was in the right place. There had only been a little too much medical zeal used in trying to keep me down. And if that excess of solicitude had not been so strenuously taken in hand for me over those next 40 hours by equally active counter-therapy, and by diagnostic probes of the sort that led Heisenberg to his principle of uncertainty, my behavior toward you since then would not have been so untoward.

While at the dinner I had wanted to demonstrate to you the wonders of the gift opera glasses, for instance. They had already enabled me to spot a small blackhead on the nose of an old friend at the back of the hall, and a long run in the nylon of his wife, but now these discoveries can no longer be verified. Then, taking the giant binoculars you gave me, which were far too powerful for views inside the room, I had found that on turning them toward the ceiling one could see right through it and obtain a marvelous view of the dark areas of the planet Mars (then in a favorable position). In fact, by utilizing the special focussing device on one of the eye-pieces, amazing resolution was achieved, and it became possible to discern that the core of each of the tiny blebs of gray-greenish material that littered these areas consisted of minute double chains of complementary nucleotides. However, they seemed unorthodox, and it was uncertain whether they more nearly resembled our terrestrial RNA or DNA, or were different from both. As for protein (or should I say its analog?), that is quite another story, but I do not wish to become too technical here, and prefer to leave this extraordinary matter for a later publication.

Although these were thrilling experiences, what made me feel most beside myself was seeing the remarkable portrait in which I found myself at once idealized and materialized. Permit me to tell you in this connection a dream I once had that was in a way analogous, although bitter instead of sweet. I dreamt that one night I was in a strange building and entered a darkened room. There the shaft of light from the opened door revealed on a bed a body which, on closer inspection, proved to be my own. Now, a person has only a given amount of life and so, as I looked at my counterpart and it rose up and began assuming animation, I found the vitality rapidly ebbing from myself into it. Fortunately I managed, by a supreme effort, to withdraw from the room, and as I was closing the door I saw the body sink back prone, while I felt a gladsome surge of resuscitation.

Now, in the case of the picture I had had no such initial feeling of depression, only of good will at meeting so prepossessing a version of myself, yet I must have subconsciously felt that my job was now done, and that even my flesh had reached its final form. At any rate, what the doctor exclaimed a little later, as I lay flat and the portrait stood steadfastly upright, was that all the color had left me and was in it. However, I have by this time overcome the ambivalence of this dichotomy, and am glad to announce that I have successfully completed the replication, with ample color and animation in both the old and the new representatives of my being.

I was gratified at the lengths to which my well-wishers went in applying their belief in the significance of replication, by extending it not only to me personally but also to my works. Although the latter procedure may smack of Lamarckism, far be it from me to object to it in this case. Bentley Glass, as master of ceremonies, was delicate in suggesting that the reason for having the "festschrift" composed of my own writings was in order to make sure that the material would meet with my approval. I have been touched by this sentiment, despite the presence in the forthcoming publication of occasional statements which I should today disagree with.

On the other hand, I have only enthusiasm for the contents of the precursor volume (first intended as a dummy) that was presented to me at the party. For the signatures of those present, which enliven its originally blank pages, will serve as a precious memento. I want to convey my appreciation here to the bright spirit, whoever he is, who in the emergency had the quick inspiration of getting people to contribute these, their distinguishing marks. Moreover, I for my part hereby undertake never to enter in on the page above such a name any compromising statement, check, or pledge.

Of course the big collection of congratulatory letters and telegrams is even more impressive. The stiff outside covers between which they are festively bound are beautifully illuminated by the double chains of nucleotides coursing down them. Having been told that these were synthesized de novo by Elof Carlson, I am not too surprised to note the unorthodox forms of the contained bases, which may read "Carlson" instead of cytosine, "Glass" instead of guanine, "Abrahamson" instead of adenine, "Tallan" instead of thymine, etc. etc., not to mention even more drastic substitutions. Somehow, these types seem very like the outlandish bases (each attached to its very proper sugar!) that I thought I discerned on looking through the giant binoculars. I wonder if Elof, in preparing these covers, could have been using these same binoculars, or whether we are subject to some common bias or perceptual transfer. In any case, it will be fascinating to follow out what these anomalous types give rise to on their further replication.

However that may be, this book will be placed on permanent exhibition for unrestricted scrutiny of its exterior and interior. I want to express my profound gratitude for all of it, but more especially for the many messages in it from abroad. Of these, the ones sent to me by ten of my cherished friends in the U.S.S.R. raise the most nostalgic feelings of all, and I am deeply moved to have had this unexpected opportunity of exchanging greetings with their senders once more, across such great spans of space, time, and circumstance. May this be a sign of happier, healthier times ahead for all of us, times when we may all freely celebrate together and work together.

I do regret that I so rudely cut short Edgar's valiant speech, yet I must plead that there was provocation. And I earnestly apologize for not having given Pete Oliver, Jim Crow, Bentley Glass, or anyone else with prepared addresses an opportunity to give birth to them. From my experience of having to withhold my own talk that had been scheduled for the following morning I know what inner frustration can be caused by such an event. Yet let us look on the bright side: on all the embarrassment that was saved on the part of those who would have disagreed, and on the fact that now the authors have ready-made material which, with a little adaptation, they may be able to use in connection with some other person and occasion.

In conclusion, I thank you all most heartily, not just for the welcome gifts, for the banquet, for the speeches delivered and undelivered, and for the opportunity to get greetings from friends far away, but, most of all, for making me aware of so many of you together and for letting me feel the collective and individual warmth of your presence. To have all of this in my old Alma Mater was another happy feature of the event for me. True, it was too much to happen all at once, but in the time since then I have gradually assimilated it, and I would not have it less.

Yours for the future of genetics, theoretical and applied,
Yours for further conquests of the genes, by the genes, and for the
genes, grown conscious at last of themselves, **in ourselves,**

Tepuan Tepuanobun or Hermann or Joe
H. J. Muller
H. J. Muller

HJM:slh

Dear Josh:
It's good you missed this dinner,
at which I "cooked out" at a critical juncture,
but I was delighted to learn you'd sent a
message through the organizers of it. All
best wishes from Joe